Research Plan Proposal

From Tradition to Modernity: Diasporic Concerns in the Selected Novelsof Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta

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Research Problem

Diaspora has its dynamics of origin and growth, formulation and explication. The term which was originally used for the dispersed community now shares its meaning with other displaced population due to slavery, partition, forced or wilful migration. According to KhachigToloyan "Diaspora has emerged as an umbrella term which includes not only Jewish, Greek and Armenian but includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community."(Safran, 1991)

Indian diaspora is one of the largest diaspora and has gained widespread recognition in academic as well as political discourses. Today the Indian Diaspora has reached the mark more than 25 million, dispersed around the globe in more than 200 countries with a high concentration in regions such as The Middle East, The United States of America, Malaysia, South Africa. ("Engaging Diaspora: The Indian Growth Story" –Eleventh PravasiBhartiya Divas,2013). Migration takes place due to various reasons and in the Indian context the migratory movements are governed by historical, political, economic reasons including push and pull factors such as higher education, better prospects and marriage.

Diaspora and transnationalism are widely used concepts, although originally referring to quite different phenomena, they increasingly overlap today.No doubt, many of the Indians have left their motherland to seek anchor in various other countries. The reason for this movement ranges from indentured labour to seeking better prospects. The sense of homelessness which every immigrant suffers is genuine and intense; but in recent times it has been seen that this concept has been minimized and made less intense through their social networking and sense of solidarity. However, the Indian community has shown greater sense of adjustments, adaptability, mobility and accessibility.This aspect is very beautifullybrought out by Bhiku Parekh who states: The

diasporic Indian is “like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he increasingly comes to feel at home in the world.”(Parekh, 1993)

The Indian diaspora has a transnational perspective and differs from International migration. "In transnational migration, persons literally live their lives across international borders" (Glick Schiller, 1999:96). In such a situation they create transnational relations and become a single transnational diaspora. The Indian diaspora developed gradually during the 19th and 20th century when emigration of indenture and contract labourers took place in Asia, Africa, Caribbean and Far Eastern countries. Today the emigrant Indians are termed as People of Indian Origin (PIOs) and referred as the "Old Diaspora". During the Post-World War II many Indians migrated to the West European and American countries, while some of them went to Australia and New Zealand. They are termed as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and referred as the "New Diaspora" (Bhat, 2009).In order to analyze and understand the Indian Diaspora the study would look into the following phases of Indian diasporic evolution:

What has been the process of migration and settlement of Indians in European countries? How did they unite as an Indian group and gave up their heterogeneous multi-regional, linguistic, religious and cultural identities? How did they develop self-maintained organized associations and maintain their Indian identity? What has been the role of ethnicity in helping them to strengthen their diasporic identity? Finally, how did they develop their global identity as an Indian Diaspora?

The chief questions I will investigate are, Is the diasporic population totally assimilated in the foreign land and have become global citizens or dothey still retain their cultural values and the memories still haunt them? Do they want to return to their homeland to settle down permanently or are they happy with the new identity, hyphenated identity that they have gained in the alien land? What role does memory play in the lives of diasporic population? What is the concept of Home in diaspora? Is this globalization has opened the gates for economic development or is it leading to neo-colonization?

Looking to the above questions I would like to work upon the novels of two diasporic Indian authors Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni(1956-)and Sunetra Gupta (1965-)who thematize against the background of Indian Diaspora thus exploring how the two authors contrast each other in terms of tradition and modernity and how their works

have filled the gap between culture and identity crisis to transnationalism and globalization?

I therefore hypothesize that although the means of transport and communication has developed with social media gaining higher recognition, the discrimination faced through the immigrants catches attention and to minimize this constant efforts are made. The enthusiasm of migrating out of homeland, the resolve to maintain identity and the intention to extend solidarity with the local and the transnational encompass the diasporic experience. But in times of crisis, the diasporic entity always looks forward to their homeland with a positive attitude.

In testing my hypothesis I will compare and contrast selected novels of both the authors taken up for study, analyzing each for the socio-political, economic and psychological implications on the diasporic population. The likely conclusion is that each author in her own way used the diasporic situations to examine and reflect the current social, political and economic situations of their time in the best possible way. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni describes the alien land and how the characters tries to assimilate themselves in an alien land whereas Sunetra Gupta describes the homeland memories and transnationalism.

Working Definition of Terms

Diaspora

The term "Diaspora" is derived from a Greek word, “dia” which means through and “speiro” which means to scatter. Literally diaspora means scattering or dispersion. It was originally used to describe the dispersion of Jews after their exile from Babylon in the 6^{th} century BC and later to refer to all Jewish people scattered in exile outside Palestine. Today it has come to describe any group of people who are dispersed or scattered away from their home country with a distinct collective memory and a myth to return.

Migration, Emigration and Immigration

In the European countries, the terms migration, emigration and immigration are considered synonymous, meaning "moving out from one country to another.” However, these terms differ and give a different meaning. In The Concise Oxford Dictionary the

term migration is explained as the "movement from one place to another", i.e., from one country to another country whereas the term immigration means, "coming as permanent resident into a foreign country." The term emigration expresses, "leaving one's country to settle in another."

Memory

Memory plays a vital role in the lives of diasporic entity. It is both process and raw material. Process as it covers many journeys back and forth as a new subjectivity is defined as relationships are reviewed and very often cleanses of bitterness and regret and raw material as it is the only reality which has been experienced either by them or their ancestors that has created them made them what they are. It is the raw material, primary baggage that has been lugged along the routes the context that provides meaning. It is through this they have inhabited familial social and national space.

Space

Space becomes an important category through a double process one of experience, the other of memory but the two may not reveal the same vision. The relocated space is defined through a process of selection or through an experiential reality which too has undergone transformation through shifting. Memories work through these spatial images as wide ranging as house, landscape,battle-fields, etc.

Home

Homeland corresponds to imaginary boundaries of nation-states. Diasporic subjects preserve a collective memory romanticizing their homeland and are entrusted to revitalize their homeland and connect it with the hostland. The physicality history and accomplishments of their homeland engrave itself in the collective memory of diasporic subjects.

Tradition

Tradition means the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation or the fact of being passed on in this way. Here by Tradition it means that usually the word diaspora which was associated with the dispersal of Jews from their homeland is now sharing its meaning with others words also like guest-workers, students, labourers,etc and thus this dispersal of population is going on. Before there were 'push' factors and now there are 'pull' factors for this scattering of population. The diasporic population

initially faces culture-crisis, identity-crisis, Racial discrimination which predominates Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works.

Modernity

The word Modernity means the quality of being modern. Here by modernity it means that transcultural memory has served both as theoretical tool and critical methodology to investigate the overlapping of geographical, national and cultural borders in the Indo-English novel, reflecting the phenomena of globalised modernity from individual, societal and political perspectives.

Background

The emergence and popularity of the diasporic study highlight the growing impact of the immigrant communities in the twentieth century in the spheres of economics, politics, cultural studies, sociology, literature etc. The changing world with its overwhelming global economy, politics, communication, etc. has affected human life greatly and prompted the citizens to embark on voluntary migration for better prospects of living.

One of the many contributions of this scattering of population from homeland to an alien land is the documentation of an enormous range of diasporic texts and the emergence of different organizations that work on the issues related to the diasporic subjects. Over the last decade, this issue has been of major concern to the Indian Government as well as abroad who are making constant efforts in this direction in order to maintain their ties. The major diasporic writers continue to address the issues through their works. The writers taken up for study, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta areboth contemporaries and this research will be an opportunity to examine the responses of both the writers, where Divakaruni's work reflects on how the characters struggle for the identity formation in an alien land, on the other hand Sunetra Gupta who is gaining widespread recognition and has not been much worked upon, describes about transnationalism where the characters have turned global. This perspectivegives anample opportunity to explore their works and thus compare and contrast both the authors in relation to tradition and modernity.

Diasporic experiences are best expressed by those authors who themselves have been members of the diasporic communities. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's writing is fuelled by her own experience as first generation immigrant and a woman between culture and tradition. Her concern for women of her own heritage is transmitted not only through

her novels but also through her organization “Maitri” that aims to help South-Asian women who are under stress and victims of domestic abuse in foreign land. Her works focuses on the diasporic Indian women caught between two opposing worlds. They find themselves in an in-between state, struggling tocarve out identities of their own. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni excels at depicting the cultural dialectics of immigrant experience, like any other contemporary writers.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's*The Mistress of Spices*(1997)is a mystical tale of the characters negotiating the immigrant experience and symbolically represents the struggle and inner turmoil faced by thepopulation which has moved geographically, politically, socially and culturally from its homeland India, and is trying to come to terms with a new existence in an alien land. The main protagonistand other characters living in an alien landare caught between the cultural heritage and the new found world. Due to the diverse experience, the protagonist keeps changing her identity throughout the novel, making clear how complex is the problem of identity crisis that Indians try to cope with in a foreign land. The main concern is the local expatriate Indian population living in California, far away from their homeland, and yet unable to sever the invisible ties with India, the land of their origin and suffer with racism, identity crisis, culture clash, nostalgia in the foreign land. The novel also brings out how much attached the Indian people are to their customs and traditions that in a foreign land they want to be treated by the Indian spices.

Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire* (2002) stands on its own as a novel of extraordinary depth and sensitivity and is a moving and satisfying sequel to *Sister of My Heart* (1999). *The Vine of Desire* continues the story of the two young women from Calcutta, the city of their childhood, and after years of living separate lives, they rekindle their friendship in America. The deep-seated love they feel for each other provides the support each of them needs. Through the eyes of people caught in the clash of cultures, Divakaruni reveals the rewards and the perils of breaking free from the past and the complicated, often contradictory emotions that shape the passage to independence, the unlikely relationships they form with men and women in the world outside the immigrant Indian community as well as with their families in India profoundly transform them, forcing them to question the central assumptions of theirlives.

Chitra Banerjee Divakruni's *Oleander Girl* (2013) is a coming-of-age novel in the best tradition replete with suspense which unfurls much the intricacies of relationships. It is a

story of the protagonist who is thrust out of a sheltered Kolkata life into a tortuous and troubled post 9/11 America in search of her identity which transforms her life.The novel is a classic example of feminine identity and the question of women freedom. The story involves women from three generations thus projecting the generation gap where the younger generation in quest of identity moves to the foreign land whereas the older generation presents an image of India addressing the common issues. In an attempt to highlight the changes between two cultures and the problems that the characters face after their displacement from India, Divakaruni totalizes the entire diasporic experience through the characters.

The diasporic writer Sunetra Gupta belongs to the younger generation of immigrants to Britain. Gupta's novels are mainly stories of spiritual shortfall and transnational space.Sunetra Gupta's novels are mostly inward and subjective and evoke memories from past life, interspersed with incidents brought from the present thus illuminating the modernity in her work. Gupta's novels put up a wide range of characters who are rooted in their native lands but surround the lives of the main characters who are mostly diasporic.

The novels of Sunetra Gupta are rich with distinctive modernity characteristics as for instance, the importance of a sense of place, one that is both situated in and disperses the idea of nation as opposed to the larger, unified, pan-Indian imaginative topos of post-Rushdie national narrative. To track the process of her characters' strife with their 'imaginary homeland', Gupta concentrates on cultural and geographical landscapes to demonstrate their fusion as well as antagonism.

Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain*(1992)is a SahityaAkademi Award winning novel that meditates on the East-West divide through the marriage of a beautiful Indian girl with an Englishman. The work bridges the gap between Calcutta and London. The characters are always on the go, crossing frontiers seldomat ease with themselves. Tagore has an overwhelming presence in Gupta's texts.Gupta developed a deep appreciation for literature and poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. In the novelthere are marked instances of Tagore where she effortlessly intersperses prose with poetry proving herself to be a creative translator of Tagore's songs and poems. The use of intentional lyrical prose fuses time, memory and space in the transnational narrative.

Gupta's *Moonlight into Marzipan* (1995) is about two promising scientists, who marry eachother and set up their house in Calcutta. Marriage turns the female protagonist into

the typical housewife and obstructs her career. However, by accident, she enables her husband to achieve international renown for amajor scientific discovery. Newly achieved celebrity enables the couple to move to London. However, this move leads to Promothesh'sinfidelity and Esha's ultimate suicide.

Sunetra Gupta's *So Good in Black* (2009) is a novel of richly layered narrative of moral and emotional dislocation across time and space, which dissolves all notions of static truths. The novel has a cosmopolitan setting and the characters frequently move between India, New York, Africa, Britain, for better prospects of education, living, etc. rather than being confirmed settlers in a particular community in a single locale. There is a strong blend of memories, images and landscapes to sharply focused social encounters. The novel is steeped in nostalgia and the characters are never out of their homeland in their mind.

With the publication of many new works on Indian Diaspora, I hope that this research will add to the existing scholarship by defining how the gap is filled from identity crisis, racial and culture crisis to transnationalism in the diasporic population through the writer's work thus illuminating their work as a whole. The main objective of the present research is to find out the raw and lived experiences of Indian immigrants as portrayed in diasporic Indian English fiction.

Review of Literature

Agarwal, Malti, ed. *English Literature: Voices of Indian Diaspora*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2009. Print.

The book is a collection of twenty-two research papers on the various eminent diasporic writers as Bharati Mukherjee,Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, JhumpaLahiri, Kiran Desai etc. They all voice the problems of the people living far away from their native land, being discriminated on the basis of race, colour.

The sense of displacement, desire for the return to the roots, feelings of nostalgia, remembrance of the homeland with a sense of loss that informs diasporic consciousness, identity crisis and the experience of the painful process of acculturation and adjustments is common to all who have left their homeland for an alien land.

Jain, Jasbir, ed. *Writers of The Indian Diaspora*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2011. Print.

Writers of the Indian Diaspora have been at the center stage in the last decade chiefly because of the theoretical formulation being generated by their works. Language and cultures are transformed when they come in contact with one another. These writers are often pre-occupied with the elements of nostalgia as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. They write in relation with the culture of their homeland and at the same time adopt and negotiate with the cultural space of the host land. However, looking at the diasporic literature in a broader perspective it is seen that such literature helps in understanding various cultures, breaking the barriers between different countries, globalization and even spreading universal peace.

Interestingly, the terms 'diaspora', 'exile' alienation', 'expatriation', are synonymous and possess an ambiguous status of being both a refugee and an ambassador. The two roles being different, the diasporic writers attempt at doing justice to both. As a refugee, he seeks security and protection and as an ambassador projects his own culture and helps enhance its comprehensibility.

Das. Anindita. "Locating the Female Subject in Diaspora: A Reading of Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* and Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music*. *Lapiz Lazuli an International Literary Journal* 4.2 (2014): 71-84. Print.

The article reflects the struggle of immigrant women who try to adjust in an alien land fighting against racial and gender biasness to find a dignified way of living. It highlights the new generation of middle class Indian women who in order to live life following their own wishes are eager to overcome the pull of their roots willfully accept the life of exile and alienation. Diaspora has made women conscious of their marginal status in foreign land. The unpleasant experience they face in the host country remind them of the 'otherness' and the desire to return to their 'home' either through mental or physical journey.

Differentiated at home and outside, diasporic women felt the need to adopt a different approach to voice their experiences of dislocation and subaltern status. Indian female diasporic voices have also emphasized the condition of diasporic women in their creative as well as critical works.

Sahoo, Ajaya Kumar, Michiel Baas and Thomas Faist, Eds. *Indian Diaspora and Transnationalism*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2012. Print.

The book is divided into 4 sections: Theories of Transnationalism, Transnational Family, Transnational Religion and Transnational Politics. The first section focusses on theoretical debates on transnationalism and the rest three sections focusses on thematic debates on Indian Transnationalism. The determinants of migration are certain push and pull factors such as underemployment, declining incomes that pushed highly skilled people over the border and the economic situations of The United States and Canada where the highly skilled labour were in high demand, pulled them there.

Globalization is the great facilitator of transnational lifestyle and it has been observed that crossing the border has turned into a lifestyle of its own. Due to cheaper air travel and with the advancement in technology such as internet and highly technical gadgets, it has become easier to maintain ties with the homeland as well as the hostland.

Kar, Angshuman. Ed. *Contemporary Indian Diaspora: Literary and Cultural Representations.* Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2015. Print.

In the new transnational constellation 'routes' have become more important than 'roots' and flux than fixity but then also the notion of 'home' and 'homeland' has not completely disappeared for the diasporic community. The new diaspora is not a homogenous category and is fractured in terms of not only religion, region and language but also caste and class. Overcoming all these difficulties Indian diaspora is gradually becoming an economic and political asset to India.

The book also talks about the dislocation of people within India and the *bhasha* writers who are said to be more specific in portraying the cultural nuances. Thus both diasporic writings and Indian writings with diasporic dimension needs to be studied to understand Indian diaspora writers negotiations with globalized and transnational forces but also to situate ourselves on a global map.

Jain, Jasbir. *The Diaspora Writes Home: Subcontinental Narratives.* Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2015. Print.

The writings of the diaspora differs from writing at home, primarily in its location. Thus when it looks back at the home country and writes about it, it depends on memory and reconstruction and the stories of the progeny of the indentured workers remain with us. The diaspora 'writes' home to fulfill its psychological, emotional, historical needs and the political and religious happenings that pushed the nation into orthodoxies, fundamentalism and closed spaces.

The title of the article "Writing Home" carries the meaning of representation as well as relating, hence memory and narratives are two factors which shape them. The narratives in the chapter bring together memories of homeland with all their complexities of history, politics and exile and are predominantly narratives of 'mourning'. At a sub-narrational level, there is the muted rationality for travelling abroad, for rejecting the nation and an equally poignant realization that despite it all the homeland calls.

Singh, Gurupdesh, Ed. *Diasporic Studies: Theory and Literature. Amritsar:* Guru Nanak Dev University Press and Publication, 2007. Print.

The book highlights fluid identities, feminist perspectives and the notions of center and margin, home and exile falling apart with the changing notions of diaspora giving a better understanding and importance of the word 'diaspora' in the current context.

With the decolonization of the third world in later half of 20th century, the decolonized sensibilities crusaded civil rights, gender and ethnic movements. The exemplary communities of transnational movement that once were described as Jews, Greeks now shares meanings with larger semantic domain which includes words like immigrants, expatriates, guest workers, executives of transnational corporations, etc. In the postmodern conditions responsibilities of citizens go across national borders and they are in touch with the homeland as well as the hostland. In a multi-cultural society which is an aspect of modernism, identity is no longer unitary or essential, rather it is fluid and shifting.

Sujaritha, S. ''Transformation of Diaspora Studies: From Discrimination to Identity Formation." *Lapis Lazuli An International Literary Journal.*4.2(2014): 16-28. Print.

The article tries to look at the thematic transformation of diasporic literature from discrimination faced by the diasporic community to identity formation. In order to trace these changes the writer has chosen five novels that are critically examined in chronological order. In Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971), Kamala Markandaya's*The Nowhere Man* (1972) the theme of discrimination dominates other diasporic features, whereas in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), JhumpaLahiri's*The Namesake* (2003) and ManjuKapur's*The Immigrant* (2009) the focus shifted from discrimination to identity formation.

This thematic transformation in diasporic fiction is due to the effects of globalization that enable people to move around the world easily for better job opportunities, education etc. With the advancement in technology and the power of media becoming higher with the demand for social networking sites, the discrimination faced by immigrants catches attention. The tightened law, widespread knowledge of human rights has somewhat reduced the discrimination faced by the immigrants.

Raj, P. Prayer Elmo. "The Concept of Home in Diaspora." ***Lapis Lazuli An International Literary Journal*****. 4.2 (2014): 85 – 97. Print.**

The article gives a new framework of 'home' in transnational context with self-identity and a multi-spatial approach to diaspora in understanding the changes from old diaspora to new diaspora. It discusses varied aspects of the concept of home in diaspora and how home influences diasporic experience.

Diaspora in modern times comprise transnational spaces of experience and globalization thereby amalgamating practical outlines of homeland and hostland. Diasporic subjects do not entail upon the nostalgic endeavor to convalesce their identity but formulate their self-identity and a concept of home through a progressively forward looking attitude.

Tentative Chapter Plan

Chapter 1

Introduction: Indian Diaspora Past and Present

The first chapter will explore the definition of Diaspora and will also focus on the history of Diaspora laying greater emphasis on Indian Diaspora with respect to the issues related to Diaspora in general. It will also study in detail the role of Indian Diaspora with respect to transnational dislocation and relocation.

Chapter 2

Locating the female Subject in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta

The second chapter attempts to study the female characters in relation to the diasporic issues. It will also focus on the role of female characters in the novels taken up for study.

Chapter 3

Quest for Identity with Racial and Cultural Conflict: A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Novels.

Divakaruni's novels manifest migration, mobility and diaspora in its varied forms. The third chapter will be an attempt to highlight the diasporic concerns in the novels of

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni thereby laying greater stress on the issues of identity with racial and cultural conflict.

Chapter 4

Home, Memory and Transnational Spaces: A Study of Sunetra Gupta's Novels.

The fourth chapter proposes to bring about the role of memories in creating the image of home thereby transcending transnational space with the help of the characters in the novels of Sunetra Gupta.

Chapter 5

The Paradigmatic Shift: From Diaspora to Transnationalism – A Comparative Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta.

The fifth chapter will detail the visible changes present in the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta with focus on the context of Transnationalism and issues related to it.

Chapter 6

Narrative Technique in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta

The sixth chapter proposes to analyse deeper meaning of the texts with respect to narrative technique present in the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta. In detail it proposes to explore the characters, development of plot, use of language and other aspects present in the making of the narrative thereby reflecting on the diasporic sensitivity.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The seventh chapter attempts to investigate the works of the two authors in the light of the journey from Tradition to Modernity. It will also conclude that whether we have truly become global citizensor the homeland still calls.

Research Methods

The research methods will consist of close reading,interpreting and comparing primary sources. I will also use biographical and historical materials, interviews in order to establish the social and political climate in which the author wrote. Findings would be supported with a significant number of critical essays on diaspora, diasporic concerns in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta. The approach will be multidisciplinary and will be supported by theories.

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